

The Interpretation and Experience of the Requiem in Contemporary Culture

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1. Introduction

The ‘classic’ Requiem Mass (also known as Mass for the Dead, part of the Roman Catholic liturgy) as we know it in Gregorian chant originated in the Carolingian Empire.¹ It was, and still is, sung in unison. From the fifteenth century onward, the text of the Requiem was set polyphonically by composers, giving the text a more dramatic effect.

Polyphonic Requiems from the fifteenth century onwards were composed to be used in the Roman Catholic church at funerals, at commemorations, and on All Souls’ Day (2 November). This changed in the nineteenth century. The Requiems by Berlioz (1837), Brahms (1868), Verdi (1874), Britten (1962), Ligeti (1965), Penderecki (1980), and Webber (1984), to mention a few examples, were composed for the concert hall, not for the church.² The transfer from the church building to the concert hall gave composers leeway to abandon the prescribed Latin texts and draw up their own Requiem text. No longer bound by the prescribed texts, composers sometimes left out parts of the original Latin texts (e.g., Fauré, Duruflé), used texts from other sources (e.g., Brahms), or combined the Latin texts with texts from other sources (e.g., Britten, Jenkins). With the transfer of the Requiem from the church building to the concert hall, composers seized the opportunity to make the Requiem into an individualized statement on death and the afterlife.

In this article I will explore two contemporary Requiems from a cultural perspective. I am interested in how composers and singers give meaning to the Requiem with respect to questions of death and the afterlife. I am aware of the fact that meanings created and negotiated in the musical process are not exclusively focused on death, grief, and the afterlife. ‘Musicking’ the Requiem, to use Christopher Small’s conceptualization of the performance of music,³ creates a complex interpretive tapestry. In this article, I focus on views of death and the afterlife which might emerge in the meaning-making process of musicking the Requiem.

¹ I thank my colleague Hans Verhulst and reverend Anthony Ruff OSB for the correction of the English and their comments. I am also grateful to the two anonymous reviewers of this *Yearbook* for their comments on an earlier draft of this article.

² P. BERGÉ (ed.): *Dies irae. Kroniek van het requiem* (Leuven 2011).

³ Chr. SMALL: *Musicking. The meanings of performing and listening* (Middletown, CT 1998).

Because of the freedom taken with texts since the nineteenth century, changing meanings of death and grief in contemporary Western culture were able to be introduced into the Requiem. A diversity of cultural meanings can be seen in the texts chosen by the composers. Furthermore, meanings are made manifest and are even negotiated in the interaction of composer, performers, and audience. The music's performance brings the meanings 'to life'. That is, in the conductor's and singers' preparation and performing and the audience's listening, the contemporary meanings of death and grief are in the moment intersubjectively real.

This leads to the following closely related questions for inquiry: 1) How can the contemporary Requiem be interpreted as an expression of contemporary views and experiences of death and bereavement? 2) How is the contemporary Requiem shaped into a personal, musicalized view of death by contemporary composers?, and 3) How are contemporary Requiems experienced and interpreted by singers? These questions should make clear that I am considering the Requiem as a cultural form, while the Requiem is treated as a musical form in most books and articles.⁴ In my opinion, the Requiem is more than music waiting to be performed; it is also a means of producing culture, in this case: the culture of handling death and afterlife.

The first question is a methodological one. By answering this question I will explore the ways a Requiem can be analyzed and interpreted in postmodern culture, and this puts in perspective dominant interpretations by so-called authorities such as composers and scholars.⁵ I have used ethnographic tools, more specifically: the elicitation method, to reveal 'interpretation' and 'meaning' not as fixed truths, but as intersubjective processes. In the following section I will elaborate on the methodological issues.

These questions are raised in the context of research on secularization as a process of transferring power from institutional churches to individuals and the transformation of religion in our culture,⁶ the role the arts play in this process,⁷

⁴ E.g. R. CHASE: *Dies irae. A guide to requiem music* (Lanham, MD 2003).

⁵ See also: M. BARNARD: 'Bricolageliturgie. Liturgical studies revisited', in *Verbum et ecclesia* 29/1 (2008) 14-31.

⁶ W.B.H.J. VAN DE DONK, A.P. JONKERS, G.J. KRONJEE & R.J.J.M. PLUM (red.): *Geloven in het publieke domein. Verkenningen van een dubbele transformatie* (= WRR Verkenningen 13) (Amsterdam 2006); G. LYNCH: *The sacred in the modern world. A cultural sociological approach* (Oxford 2012); Th.A. TWEED: *Crossing and dwelling. A theory of religion* (Cambridge, MS / London 2006).

⁷ M. BARNARD & G. VAN DE HAAR (red.): *De bijbel cultureel. De bijbel in de kunsten van de twintigste eeuw* (Zoetermeer / Kapellen 2009); M.E. BRINKMAN: *Jezus incognito. De verborgen Christus in de westerse kunst vanaf 1960* (Zoetermeer 2012); M. COBUSSEN: *Thresholds. Retinking spirituality through music* (Aldershot etc. 2008); W. STOKER: *Where heaven and earth meet. The spiritual in the art of Kandinsky, Rothko, Warhol, and Kiefer* (Amsterdam etc. 2012); Ph. VERDULT: *God en kunst. Over het verdwijnen en het verschijnen van het religieuze in de kunst* (Tiel 2009).

and changing attitudes towards death and the afterlife.⁸ Within the limited scope of this article, I will not elaborate on these issues; I will confine myself to referring to some relevant literature.

2. Interpreting the Requiem

Composers writing polyphonic settings of the Requiem from the nineteenth century onwards not only felt free to abandon the common Latin texts and draw up their own text, they also communicated their personal interpretation of the texts. I am prompted to this assertion by a statement made by composer Gabriel Fauré, who composed the first version of his *Requiem in D minor* between 1887 and 1888.⁹ Perhaps Fauré was inspired in his work on the *Requiem* by the deaths of his father in 1885 and his mother in 1887.¹⁰ But in spite of the grief this bereavement must have caused him, he said he had worked on it with great pleasure. In reference to the *Requiem*, he said in an interview: ‘That is how I see death: as a joyful deliverance, an aspiration towards happiness beyond the grave, rather than as a painful experience.’¹¹

2.1. The meaning of music

Behind this statement, an important theoretical question appears that needs to be dealt with first: is music capable of communicating views of death? Does music have a referential or narrative potency? Is music *about* something, or do we have to confine ourselves to *Music alone*, to cite the title of a book by Peter Kivy?¹² Philosophy of music teaches us that there is no direct relationship between the tones on the one hand and objects or concepts of the reality we live in on the other.¹³ The meaning of music is a matter of interpretation, but in the

⁸ Ph. ARIES: *Western attitudes toward death. From the Middle Ages to the present* (Baltimore etc. 1974); A. ÁRNASON: ‘Individuals and relationships. On the possibilities and impossibilities of presence’, in D.J. DAVIES & C.-W. PARK (eds.): *Emotion, identity and death. Mortality across disciplines* (Farnham / Surrey 2012) 59-70; T. WALTER: ‘Facing death without tradition’, in G. HOWARTH & P.C. JUPP (eds.): *Contemporary issues in the sociology of death, dying, and disposal* (New York 1996) 193-204; J. WOJTKOWIAK: ‘I’m dead, therefore I am’. *The postself and notions of immortality in contemporary Dutch society* (Nijmegen 2012).

⁹ BERGÉ: *Dies irae* 181-189.

¹⁰ A. ROBERTSON: *Requiem. Music of mourning and consolation* (New York / Washington 1967) 117.

¹¹ L. AGUETTANT: ‘Rencontres avec Gabriel Fauré’, in *Études fauréliennes* 19 (1982) 3-7.

¹² P. KIVY: *Music alone. Philosophical reflections on the purely musical experience* (Ithaca 1990).

¹³ For an overview of views of ‘music and meaning’, see: C. KOOPMAN: ‘Muzikale betekenis in veelvoud. Een poging tot ordening’, in *Tijdschrift voor muziektheorie* 4/2 (1999) 24-33; C. KOOPMAN & S. DAVIES: ‘Musical meaning in a broader perspective’, in *Journal of aesthetics and art criticism* 59/3 (2001) 261-273.

case of the Requiem the texts and the context play an important role. Although many composers, singers, and listeners do not identify with the Christian content of the Requiem, they do recognize the Requiem as ‘an intercultural symbol of death and mourning in music’.¹⁴ The argument put forward here is that in the case of the Requiem, music is able to point to extra-musical concepts. The meaning(s) of a concrete Requiem arise(s) from the musical experience on the one hand, and the contextual and performative parameters (such as the place and occasion of the performance, the text and the explanation of the text in the program notes, ritual actions preceding or during the performance) on the other.¹⁵

The view of death evoked by a particular Requiem always depends on how the listeners put their musical experiences into words, which in turn is influenced by the above-mentioned contextual and performative parameters. We always have to ask ourselves whose wording of the musical experience it is that is presented as ‘the’ meaning of a particular composition. In my opinion, we need to distinguish four different interpreters: the composer, the scholar, the performers, and the members of the audience. In what follows, I will discuss the specific position of these four interpreters.

First, the interpretation by the composer can only be communicated by the composer himself or herself, or in conversations with the composer. From a performative perspective it is important to acknowledge that the interpretation by the composer is not the ‘real’ or most important meaning of a composition, as is often thought.¹⁶ In many cases we do not even know the interpretation or intention of the composer, and even if we have knowledge of it, the listener’s experience and interpretation of the composition can be totally different. Moreover, the view that the composer’s interpretation is the real meaning suggests that meaning is an immanent part of the composition and that the ‘performance plays no part in the creative process, being only the medium through which the isolated, self-contained work has to pass in order to reach its goal, the listener.’¹⁷

Secondly, the interpretation by the scholar (e.g. a musicologist, or a conductor preparing the performance) is the result of a thorough analysis of the composition. We should be critical of such an interpretation, because the scholar uses the score as one of his or her sources, which results in a totally different perception of the composition than the musical experience of merely listening to a

¹⁴ W. MARX: ‘*De morte transire ad vitam?* Emotion and identity in nineteenth-century Requiem compositions’, in DAVIES & PARK (eds.): *Emotion, identity and death* 189-203.

¹⁵ D. BACHMANN-MEDICK: *Cultural turns. Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften* (Reinbek 2009); E. FISCHER-LICHTE: *The transformative power of performance. A new aesthetics* (London / New York 2008).

¹⁶ This is reflected in the ‘authenticity discussion’ in the early music movement, see R. TARUSKIN: ‘The pastness of the present and the presence of the past’, in N. KENYON (ed.): *Authenticity and early music* (Oxford 1988) 137-210.

¹⁷ SMALL: *Musicking* 5.

performance. The scholar is usually an informed listener and tries to describe in prose the meanings ‘discovered’ in the composition. In the presentation of their personal interpretation, scholars sometimes put this interpretation forward as being or revealing the (original) intention of the composer. Instead of ‘scholars’ we can equally read ‘conductors’. The conductor analyzes a composition and arrives at a certain interpretation, which he or she tries to realize in a performance.

Thirdly, there are performers such as members of instrumental ensembles, soloists, and choirs. They participate in the interpretation process, but they usually do not have an overview of the entire composition. During rehearsals they gradually become informed and are challenged to form an opinion about the composition. Generally, the opinion of the individual musicians has no role to play in the interpretation process leading to a concrete performance. For me, the choir is an interesting group, because the members are easy to contact and their familiarity with the performed composition makes it possible to activate the process of meaning-making by elicitation of their musical experiences. I will discuss this specific elicitation method below.

Fourthly, there are the listeners, perhaps the most important group in the meaning-making process, but logistically they are difficult to approach. We are dealing with a multitude of interpretations and experiences here which can be explored by survey or ethnographic research.

In this article, I will take up the analysis and interpretation of two contemporary Requiems by employing the perspective of the scholar: I am the ‘listener’ (with my eyes and ears!) who analyzes and interprets the Requiems. When I use sources other than my own ears and eyes, this needs to be done transparently and with the sole aim of informing my interpretation. It is important to realize that ‘my’ interpretation is not ‘the’ interpretation. The latter simply does not exist – there is no such thing as ‘the’ interpretation – I can only present my interpretation as result of my particular listening experience, combined with an analysis of the score, while deliberately using contemporary views of death and bereavement as a key in the meaning-making process. My own interpretation will be confronted with interpretations of the Requiem by choir members. In this article I will confine myself to these two interpreters, the scholar and the choir, because I did not have the opportunity to interview the composers and to perform audience research.

2.2. Qualitative research as an inter-subjective form of knowledge production

During the last few years I have built up a large collection of Requiem masses, both on cd and in musical scores. From the twentieth and twenty-first century I have selected two quite different Requiems in relation to actual performances which I was able to attend. They are the *Requiems* by John Rutter (1985) and by Karl Jenkins (2004). The possibility of attending the performances and inter-

viewing choir members was actually the leading criterion in selecting the two Requiems.

After the presentation of my personal interpretation of the two Requiem compositions in the following, I will present the results of qualitative interviews with choirs. To perform these interviews, I used a variant of the photo elicitation method. The aim of the interviews was not to verify my own interpretation, but to widen the view on the complex meaning-making process and the various actors taking part in this process.¹⁸ My interpretations of John Rutter's and Karl Jenkins's *Requiems* are only one part of a complex meaning-making process. Various actors take part in this process, and, as stated above, the choir is one of these actors. Referring to the second question of inquiry, I want to know which meanings choir members, as performers but also as informed listeners, attribute to the Requiem they have performed during a concert. And also: do they relate their experiences and interpretations to views of death and afterlife or is this not an issue at all?

To answer these questions I employed an elicitation method, a qualitative approach which treats the respondents as active informants. In this case, I did not use the more or less classic elicitation method whereby photos are used to evoke experiences, but instead asked the choir members during a rehearsal to sing parts of the Requiem.¹⁹ By singing the choir partly re-enacted the concert, and, as a result, musical experiences were generated anew. In between the parts, I interviewed choir members about their experiences and the views of death that were evoked by the texts and the music. I have to admit that this description of the method is quite idealistic. In the everyday reality of doing research it turned out to be impossible to get access to rehearsals. At the moment when I wanted to interview choir members, the performance of the Requiem was already in the past. The choir was rehearsing other music, preparing a performance of yet another composition. So the interview had to take place outside the context of the rehearsals, with those volunteers willing to be part of my research. Instead of singing (parts of) the Requiem, we listened to a cd or sang only small parts to evoke the musical experiences of the Requiem concert. Nevertheless, the interviews themselves were a musical event and resulted in mutual conversations. The choir members (and in the case of Jenkins's *Requiem* also the conductor) not only talked to me, but also to each other, which actually made me a witness to the choir members' meaning-making process. As such, the elicitation method is not only a research technique, but also an inter-subjective form of production of knowledge and culture.²⁰

¹⁸ SMALL: *Musicking* 9.

¹⁹ C. NOTERMANS & H. KOMMERS: 'Researching religion. The iconographic elicitation method', in *Qualitative research*, published online 25 September 2012.

²⁰ H. KOMMERS: *Hidden in music. An approach to religious experience and pop or rock festivals* (Nijmegen 2013) 83, 130.

3. *Requiem* by John Rutter

John Rutter (born 1945) wrote his *Requiem* (completed in 1985)²¹ with the Fauré *Requiem* in mind.²² Like Fauré, Duruflé, and other composers, he felt free to leave out parts of the text of the traditional Requiem and to incorporate new texts. Rutter's *Requiem* is not a large-scale composition. There are two versions: one written for chamber orchestra, the other for symphony orchestra. It is also possible to perform the *Requiem* with piano or organ accompaniment.²³

Rutter's *Requiem* can be described as a rhetorical, musical ritual moving from darkness into light. Ochs names as one of the constitutive factors of funerals the oppositional setting of symbols,²⁴ and the same can be said of the Requiem as a musical-ritual form communicating a view of death. The meaning-making process is initiated by the tension in the texts, in the music, and in the relation between text and music. In the texts of Rutter's *Requiem* it is easy to indicate where the tension lies. Three parts of the text bring about a transformation from darkness into light: the two psalms and the *Agnus Dei*. First, there are the two psalms (Parts II and VI). The first one is Psalm 130, a moving prayer for mercy and salvation: *Out of the deep have I called unto thee, O Lord.*²⁵ This psalm contrasts with Psalm 23: *The Lord is my shepherd*, a psalm of trust and comfort.²⁶ Between these two psalms we find Part V: the *Agnus Dei*. In this part, a textual transformation takes place. As part of the *Agnus Dei*, three funeral sentences of the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* are included: 'Man that is born...', 'In the midst of life we are in death' and 'I am the resurrection'.²⁷ The first two sentences are about human life and mortality. The third sentence is about life after death in

²¹ J. RUTTER: *Requiem* (Oxford [Oxfordshire] 1986). I used the Naxos CD (nr. 8.557130), sung by the *Choir of Clare College*, Cambridge, conducted by Timothy Brown. Also on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=jV7kQKy-O7s.

²² On his website (www.johnrutter.com) and more elaborately on YouTube, John Rutter explains his own composition (influence, form, structure, performance, details of the seven parts of the composition). After I had done my own analysis, I watched these videos (October 2012). For the greater part, my analysis corresponds with Rutter's, but in my interpretation part V of the *Requiem* stood out.

²³ Parts of my interpretation of Rutter's and Jenkins's *Requiems* have been published in: M. J.M. HOONDEERT: 'Modern Requiem compositions and musical knowledge of death and afterlife', in Th. CATTOI & C. MOREMAN (eds.): *Death, dying, and mysticism. The ecstasy of the end* (New York 2015) 235-246.

²⁴ D.J. OCHS: *Consolatory rhetoric. Grief, symbol, and ritual in the Greco-Roman era* (Columbia 1993) 10.

²⁵ P.D. MILLER: 'Psalm 130', in *Interpretation. A journal of Bible and theology* 33/2 (1979) 176-181.

²⁶ N.A. SCHUMAN: *Pastorale. Psalm 23 in bijbel en liturgie verwoord en uitgebeeld* (Zoetermeer 2002).

²⁷ J.H. BLUNT: *The annotated Book of Common Prayer. Being an historical, ritual and theological commentary on the devotional system of the Church of England* (London 1872) 293-300.

Christ. The perspective moves from death to life. After this shift, the choir can sing Psalm 23, for the transformation of darkness into light has been completed.

Rutter composed in a symmetrical structure. Parts I and VII are taken from the official Requiem: *Requiem* and *Lux aeterna*. Parts II and VI are psalms in English. Parts III and V consist of prayers to Christ (*Pie Iesu* and *Agnus Dei*). In the middle we find the *Sanctus* (Part IV), a majestic piece of music extolling God's glory in heaven.²⁸ Despite this structure, with much attention being drawn to the majestic Part IV, the central point of the composition, in my opinion, is to be found in Part V. As we have seen in the analysis of the text, we may consider this part as a turning point in the *Requiem*. In Part V the text prays for rest for the deceased (*Agnus Dei, dona eis requiem*). And then, introduced by the Easter sequence *Victimae paschali laudes* played by the flute, the choir sings the text from the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*: 'I am the resurrection'. From that point onwards, the text sings of light, salvation and comfort.

So far I have emphasized the tensions in the texts of Rutter's *Requiem*, which are intensified by the structure of the whole composition. Text and structure communicate a view of death influenced by the Christian faith in the resurrection. Although death is taken seriously, it is not a painful experience, but – put it metaphorically – a journey into the light.

Analyzing the music, we find that there are three remarkable decisions made by the composer that contribute to the view of death laid down in the text and the structure. First, the harmonic style is completely tonal, moving from G major (Part I), to C major (Parts II, IV, V and VI), and back to G major (Part VII). Part III is in F major. The simplicity of this harmonic structure is comforting for the listener and is likely to provide a feeling of stability.²⁹ An example of this stability is the sustained 'G' as an accompaniment to the main theme of Part I (e.g., Part I, measures 78-82), which recurs at the end of the *Requiem* (Part VII, measures 107-119). Another example is the lasting 'C' in Part VI (for example measures 5-31). The tonal stability may be experienced as an expression of trust or belief in God who will rescue the deceased 'out of the deep'.

Secondly, the tonal harmonic style is enriched by so-called blue notes, also called 'worried notes'.³⁰ Blue notes are traditionally an expression of tamed grief. Influences of jazz, especially the blues, are evident in Rutter's *Requiem*. The use of blue notes is most striking in Part II: the setting of Psalm 130 resembles the blues, with flatted thirds and sevenths in the main melody. Also in Parts III (*Pie Iesu*) and V (*Agnus Dei*) the influence is clearly there. After Part V, the blue notes have disappeared.

Thirdly, the transformation of darkness into light is marked by an instrumental quotation (played by the flute) of the Easter sequence *Victimae paschali laudes*.

²⁸ *Pleni sunt caeli gloria tua*. Mark that *et terra* is omitted by Rutter.

²⁹ R. SCRUTON: *The aesthetics of music* (Oxford 1999) 260-272; R. SCRUTON, et al.: *Meer dan ontspanning alleen. Over het belang van muziek* (Budel / Nijmegen 2010).

³⁰ B. BENWARD & M.N. SAKER: *Music in theory and practice* 1 (Boston, MA / London 2009) 389.

After this quotation (Part V, measures 66-71), the text sings of resurrection. The musical motif of 'I am the resurrection' (Part V) is the same as that of *The Lord is my shepherd* (Part VI). There is strong musical coherence between the end of Part V and the beginning of Part VI.

In his decisions with regard to text, structure, and music, John Rutter, according to my analysis, communicates a comforting view of death. This view, however, is not simply communicated, but is also achieved by constructing a textual and musical road. In a certain sense, Rutter's *Requiem* is a musical and ritualized form of transformation, helping the listener across the boundary between 'death is death' on the one side and 'death is new-found life' on the other. Is Rutter's *Requiem*, by referring to the Christian faith in the resurrection, outdated, an expression of a lost, or at least declining faith? I don't think so. His *Requiem* is indeed a firm expression of belief in the resurrection, but this belief is in no way 'cheap', being attained as it is after a musical and ritual transformation. Grief and hope are part of this *Requiem*, and this fits the sometimes troubling emotions related to our death experiences.³¹ In his fascinating book *The theology of death*, Douglas Davies warns against the religious 'denial of death'.³² In my opinion, death as presented in Rutter's *Requiem* is not an 'easy' transition; Rutter tries to strengthen the listener's hope and faith through the transformative sequence of the parts of his *Requiem*. His *Requiem* is a musicalized invitation and challenge to conversion, not as a once-in-a-lifetime event, but as a process that can be repeated time and again.

4. *Requiem* by Karl Jenkins

The *Requiem* by Karl Jenkins (born 1944) was first performed in March 2005 in England and received favorable reviews.³³ With regard to the text of the *Requiem* (completed in 2004), Jenkins made two distinctive choices. First, he combined the traditional Latin texts with Japanese haikus referring to nature. Secondly, Jenkins made use of the old text of the Requiem, stipulated after the Council of Trent in the book of rites of 1614.³⁴ In 1969 the Roman Catholic funeral liturgy was reformed. The old Tridentine rite for the funeral liturgy was literally and metaphorically black. Both the clothes worn by the mourners and the liturgical color were black. Often black drapes would be hung by the entrance of the church and in the sanctuary. The somber and somewhat anxious

³¹ M.S. STROEBE & H. SCHUT: 'Meaning making in the dual process model of coping with bereavement', in R.A. NEIMEYER (ed.): *Meaning reconstruction and the experience of loss* (Washington, DC 2001) 55-76.

³² D.J. DAVIES: *The theology of death* (London / New York 2007) 178-179.

³³ K. JENKINS: *Requiem* (London 2005). I used the EMI CD (nr. 7243 5 57966 2 2), a performance conducted by the composer himself.

³⁴ *Rituale Romanum* (Rome 1614) title VII: *De exsequiis*.

atmosphere of the rite was further intensified by the sequence *Dies irae*.³⁵ In the 1969 *Order of Christian funerals*, an entirely new course was taken. The emphasis was no longer on the judgment and punishment that the deceased has to undergo for his or her sins, but rather on the memory of the paschal mystery of Christ which the deceased shares in. As a result of this substantive renewal the *Dies irae* is no longer part of the Requiem. It is therefore remarkable that Jenkins in his *Requiem* decided to reintroduce the *Dies irae*.

The combination of the old Latin Requiem texts with the Japanese haikus offers an eclectic view of death. First, there are the Requiem texts praying for 'rest' (Latin: *requiem*) for the deceased. This refers to rest as it is used by church father Saint Augustine, in the meaning of an end to the restless searching and chaos of human existence and finding rest in God instead.³⁶ It also refers to the dead as sleeping, waiting for the resurrection.³⁷ In addition, there are the passages from the *Dies irae* dealing with guilt, shame, fear of judgment, and punishment. Thirdly, there are the Japanese haikus, with their images of nature, for example (Part III, English translation quoted from the score): 'The snow of yesterday / that fell like cherry blossoms / is water once again.' This haiku evokes death as a passing away and reappearing, a recurring cycle, the 'circle of life'. Thus, three quite different views of death are communicated in the texts: death is rest in God and sleep in expectation to the resurrection (a theological view), death comes with judgment (a view in which the incompleteness of life dominates), and death is part of the circle of life (reincarnation).

Jenkins uses various musical styles. To trace the different styles we can confine ourselves to the first three parts: the Introit *Requiem aeternam* including the *Kyrie*, the *Dies irae* (verses 1 through 7), and the first Haiku *Hana to mishi* ('The snow of yesterday'). The first part is romantic in tone and is composed in a traditional style, in continuity with early twentieth-century compositions. This part mostly resembles the style of Rutter's *Requiem*, who, as said before, was profoundly influenced by Fauré. In the second part, the *Dies irae*, we hear a kind of music that Jenkins characterizes as 'hip hop music'.³⁸ The way I experience it, Jenkins here mixes the *Dies irae* of the Verdi *Requiem* and *O Fortuna* from Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*. In the third part, the Japanese haiku, we hear Asian music, adapted to western, female voices. The different styles of music stand side by side, which results in an eclectic sound.

As stated above, Jenkins used texts that communicate different views of death. This is further intensified by his use of various musical styles. In my interpretation, Jenkins makes clear that death is a transcultural theme, which is

³⁵ J. LAMBERTS: 'De rooms-katholieke uitvaartliturgie', in L. LEIJSEN (red.): *Levensrituelen. Dood en begrafenissen* (= Kadoc-studies 31) (Leuven 2007) 119-135.

³⁶ AURELIUS AUGUSTINUS: *Belijdenissen* (Budel 2009) 39 (= Book I,1).

³⁷ J. KROESEN: 'De doodslaapmetafoor in de Groninger grafkunst', in *Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift* 68/1 (2014) 52-66.

³⁸ That is what Jenkins tells us about the *Dies irae* in the trailer of the *Requiem*. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=VSpGOpUJWHw (accessed 16 December 2012).

expressed in different languages and different musical styles. This *Requiem* reflects our postmodern culture in which there are many views of death existing side by side. The view that there is no afterlife at all co-exists with a belief in the resurrection and the idea of reincarnation. In the Netherlands long-term research on faith has been carried out among others by Ton Bernts, Gerard Dekker, and Joep de Hart. Surveys were taken in 1966, 1979, 1996, and 2006. One of the recurring questions was: do you believe in life after death? In 2006, 40% of the respondents said they believe in life after death, 31% reported they are uncertain about this question, and only 29% rejected the notion of an afterlife altogether.³⁹ Among the 40% who do believe in an afterlife, we can observe many nuances as to the kind of afterlife they believe in. We encounter belief in heaven, in a soul, in reincarnation. This nuanced belief in afterlife is not something new that is exclusive to our era. Thus, even in the Bible for example we find different views of afterlife existing side by side: belief in the resurrection is dominant, but some texts speak hopefully of life in relation with God as an open ending, or even of death as the end of life without any kind of afterlife being imagined.⁴⁰ The *Requiem* by Karl Jenkins incorporates these multiple views of death and afterlife in the Bible and in contemporary culture. His *Requiem* is as eclectic as our culture is. Jenkins has juxtaposed musical styles, texts and views of death, and it is up to the listener to make choices... or not. It is also possible to experience Jenkins's eclectic *Requiem* as an expression of not-knowing our future beyond the boundaries of life.

5. Interviews with choir members

5.1. Rutter's *Requiem* in Middelburg

On 22 May, 2013 I interviewed five choir members of the *Royal Oratorio Association* in Middelburg in the southwest of the Netherlands. Two weeks earlier, on 4 May, they had performed Rutter's *Requiem* as a commemoration concert for the dead. It is important to know that 4 May is Memorial Day in the Netherlands. The choir has established the tradition of alternately singing Bach's *John's Passion* on Good Friday one year, and a Requiem on 4 May the next year.⁴¹ Each time the conductor chooses a different Requiem, and this was the first time they performed Rutter's *Requiem*.

³⁹ A.P.J. BERNTS, G. DEKKER & J. DE HART: *God in Nederland, 1996-2006* (Kampen 2007) 49.

⁴⁰ W. WEREN: *Dood, en dan? Stemmen uit de Bijbel, echo's in onze cultuur* (Zoetermeer / Kapellen 2010).

⁴¹ See also: M. HOONDERT: 'All Souls' Day Requiem concerts as civil rituals', in *Questions liturgiques / Studies in liturgy* 94 (2013) 330-346.

I started the interview by eliciting the *Requiem* by having them sing the main theme of the first part. We talked about certain technical aspects of Rutter's *Requiem* and the problems at the rehearsals preceding the performance. Subsequently I inquired about the structure of the *Requiem*:

- Martin The *Requiem* consists of seven parts. Is there one specific part that stands out for you?
- All members Yes there is!
- Martin Maybe it's different for each of you.
- Suzanna I don't think so.
- Ted For me it's the 'folk song'. I call it the 'folk song'.
- Suzanna The *Sanctus*. That's a really wonderful part in the *Requiem*. It's an explosion of joy. Helping someone along in a Requiem.
- Martin Is it a turning point in the *Requiem*, does it flower into full bloom from that point onwards? How do you feel about that?
- Suzanna Not for me it's not. It's a beautiful central piece, where you can let yourself go completely. But then it's back to sobriety, to feeling, subdued. It's definitely part of the whole though.
- René I wrote 'jubilation' above it.
- Marijke Quite extraordinary in a Requiem.
- Martin Do we all recognize this?
- Ted It does stand out, yes, but – I was just going over the Requiem – for me the highlight is 'The Lord is my shepherd.' I call that the 'folk song'. I'd find it hard to decide.
- Suzanna That's a psalm.
- Martin But Part IV, the *Sanctus*, that's an explosion of sound. You've got 'jubilation' written above it, but it is a Requiem. And it's the fourth of May, Memorial Day. Do you feel that's fitting for the occasion?
- Ted Yes it is, for one such part it is. There are other parts too, that we wrote 'sadness' above, to indicate that the atmosphere was quite different there.
- René For me it also expressed that there's light at the end of the darkness.
- Suzanna Yes, something to hold on to.

In their analysis, the choir members identify Part IV, the *Sanctus*, as the most striking part of Rutter's *Requiem*. They emphasize the joyful character of this part, in contrast to the other parts. One of the choir members highlighted Part VI ('The Lord is my shepherd') as his favorite, calling it a folk song. In my opinion, what he highlights here is the musical attractiveness of this part, but he agrees with his fellow choir members that Part IV is more important in the structure of the *Requiem* in its entirety. In contrast to my interpretation of the *Requiem*, the choir members did not experience the performance of the *Requiem* as a road from darkness to light, and as such as a transformative form, but in-

stead they highlighted Part IV as a unique part in the *Requiem*. They interpret Part IV as something to hold on to, as a beacon in a context of grief and mourning, an exceptional experience of light and glory. In my opinion, it is remarkable that the choir members did not mention (and experience!) the transformation in terms of the textual and musical content of the *Requiem*.

5.2. Jenkins's *Requiem* in Dinxperlo

In connection with Jenkins's *Requiem*, an interview took place on 28 May 2013 with seven members and the conductor of the *Women's Choir Musica*. The choir is located in Dinxperlo, in the east of the Netherlands. The choir performed Jenkins's *Requiem* twice, on 13 and 20 November 2011, together with a second choir. In the concert, Parts II (*Dies irae*) and IV (*Rex tremendae*) were omitted because they were deemed too difficult. This must have influenced the listening and performing experiences of the *Requiem*, all the more so because these are the less romantic parts of the *Requiem*, and leaving them out thus affects the balance intended by the composer. Two parts of the *Requiem*, the *Lacrimosa* (Part VII) and the *Pie Jesu* (Part IX), were part of a commemoration service held in the Protestant church of Dinxperlo in November 2012.

We started the interview by listening to the first part of the *Requiem* on cd. After talking about the occasions of the performance of Jenkins's *Requiem*, I asked about their experience while performing the *Requiem* in a concert. There were three remarks that struck me. First, to my question on what the choir is trying to communicate, one of the choir members answered: 'Something beautiful, something that transcends us.' Secondly, the conductor highlighted the variety in Jenkins's composition: 'The atmosphere changes time and again; you become part of it, quite intensely.' Thirdly, one of the choir members compared Jenkins's *Requiem* with other Requiems, remarking:

Singer: Compared to other Requiems, this *Requiem* is intensely comforting, due to the influence of a profane musical style. When I hear the beginning of this *Requiem* my reaction is: 'Yes, that's the way I want to go to the end of the tunnel.' Other Requiems can intensify your grief, leading you to hell. But this music is comforting.

Beauty, engagement and consolation are the keywords in these quotes from the interview. Characteristic are proximity ('you become part of it', 'profane music'), as well as transcendence ('something that transcends us', 'intensely comforting'). The sense of proximity, the intense experience of 'being with the music', is described by philosopher Roger Scruton as: 'you are the music while the music lasts.'⁴² This musical experience is a set-apart moment and as such a sacred moment. I do not refer to the sacred as an ontological category, nor do I equate it with an institutional religious appropriation. Instead, I follow cultural

⁴² SCRUTON: *The aesthetics of music* 364.

sociologist Gordon Lynch in stating that the sacred is a contingent, historically situated concept.⁴³ In this case, the sacred is realized in the performance of Jenkins's *Requiem*, which temporarily lifts performers and listeners out of their daily lives and sorrows, leading to 'deep experiences' of community (or as Turner would say: *communitas*) and consolation. The phrasing of these experiences is influenced by the context of the concert, the title of the composition (*Requiem*) and the program notes. But it is the music itself, in the ritualized context of the concert, that 'embraces' the listener, providing a consoling experience which transcends both the performer and the listener.

In the way the choir members and the conductor talked about Jenkins's *Requiem* no distinction is made between the views of death expressed in both texts and music according to my interpretation. What prevailed in the musical experience is the romantic sound, which was interpreted as comforting. The reference to death and afterlife has been appropriated in a less marked way, not referring to institutionalized views of death, but to the common talk about near-death experiences ('the end of the tunnel').⁴⁴

5.3. Views of death or consolation?

Although choir members are informed listeners, they express their interpretation-as-heard,⁴⁵ and not, as I expected, an interpretation based on their experiences during performances combined with knowledge about the score, acquired while rehearsing. In the interpretation-as-heard of Rutter's *Requiem*, the contrast between the joyful Part IV and the other parts is dominant; in Jenkins's *Requiem* the romantic sound comes first. The music is sensed rather than interpreted. In this sensing, performers, and I assume listeners as well, might deal with experiences of death. The music, framed by the circumstances, offers a soundscape to deal with death, without words or explicit views. This leads to 'musical' coping with death,⁴⁶ not explicit knowledge and intellectual coping;⁴⁷ but rather a vague feeling about the consequences of death for the listener's personal life, instead of explicit views of death and afterlife. Quoting my colleague Albertina Nugteren, the choir members 'think through their bodies'.⁴⁸ In addition to my

⁴³ LYNCH: *The sacred in the modern world* 13.

⁴⁴ P. VAN LOMMEL: *Eindeloos bewustzijn. Een wetenschappelijke visie op de bijna-dood ervaring* (Kampen 2007).

⁴⁵ J. HELLABY: *Reading musical interpretation. Case studies in solo piano performance* (Farnham 2009).

⁴⁶ F. ALBERGATO-MUTERSPAW: *The role of music in healing and grief processes of bereaved adult learners* (PHD Thesis Pennsylvania State University 2009) 40.

⁴⁷ Chr. JEDAN: 'Troost door argumenten. Herwaardering van een filosofische en christelijke traditie', in *Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift* 68/1 (2014) 7-22.

⁴⁸ A. NUGTEREN: 'Sensing the "Sacred"? Body, senses and intersensoriality in the academic study of ritual', in *Jaarboek voor liturgieonderzoek / Yearbook for liturgical and ritual studies* 29 (2013) 49-65.

interpretation of Rutter's and Jenkins's *Requiems*, their perceived view of death is to a lesser degree informed by institutionalized views, and additionally by unexpected experiences of light and glory (Rutter) and stories of near-death experiences (Jenkins). Perhaps – but this requires further research – these experiences are more about consolation than about views of death and afterlife.⁴⁹

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⁴⁹ M. HOONDEERT: 'Muziek, rouw en troost. Rouw vanuit muzikaal perspectief' in J. MAES & H. MODDERMAN (red.): *Handboek rouw, rouwbegeleiding, rouwtherapie. Tussen presentie en interventie* (Antwerpen 2014) 396-406; M.J.M. HOONDEERT: 'Geruststellende klanken. Muziek en crematierituelen', in *Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift* 68/1 (2014) 120-131.

